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Viewing cable 09ANKARA1722, GULEN - TURKEY'S INVISIBLE MAN CASTS LONG SHADOW

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09ANKARA1722**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ANKARA1722	2009-12-04 11:11	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/abd-belgelerinde-fethullah-gulen.htm>

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OO RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHFL RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHKW RUEHLA
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1371
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 6598
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA// PRIORITY
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RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY
RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001722

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: GULEN - TURKEY'S INVISIBLE MAN CASTS LONG SHADOW

REF: A. ANKARA 1029

[1](#)B. ANKARA 834

Classified By: Ambassador James Jeffrey, for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Fethullah Gulen remains a political phenomenon in Turkey. Although "exiled" in Pennsylvania for the past decade, Gulen's impact continues to expand, aided by legions of loyalist supporters and a network of elite schools. The Gulen Movement's purported goals focus on interfaith dialogue and tolerance, but in the current AKP-secularists schism, many Turks believe Gulen has a deeper and possibly insidious political agenda, and even some Islamist groups criticize Gulen's lack of transparency, which they say creates doubts about his motives. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Gulen was born between 1938-1942 (varying dates have been given), and initially served as an imam and as an employee of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). He established his own movement in the 1970s based on the teachings of Said Nursi, an Islamic thinker of Kurdish origin, whose followers are called Nurcus. Gulen then broke away from the Nursi framework. Gulen's own philosophy emphasizes the role of science in Islam. He supports interfaith dialogue and condemns terrorism. In the past two decades, Gulen has focused primarily on education, not only in Turkey but around the world. His schools have earned a reputation particularly in Central and South Asia for academic excellence and the advocacy of moderate Islamic views.

Indicted, Then Acquitted

[1](#)3. (SBU) Gulen has been living in the U.S. since 1999 when he went there ostensibly for health treatments (a heart condition and diabetes). At the same time, however, he faced charges in Turkey of plotting to overthrow the state. The charges were based on a 1986 sermon where Gulen is heard declaring that "our friends, who have positions in legislative and administrative bodies, should learn its details and be vigilant all the time so they can transform it and be more fruitful on behalf of Islam in order to carry out a nationwide restoration." This indictment gave his travel to the U.S. the appearance of his being a fugitive from the Turkish judicial system. A Turkish Court acquitted him of all charges in 2006. That acquittal was appealed but the acquittal was upheld in 2008.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In the meantime, Gulen had applied for Permanent Residence status in the U.S. Immigration officials initially rejected Gulen's application to be classified as "an alien of extraordinary ability," but a Federal Court ruled in late 2008 that this rejection had been improper. Gulen now holds a Green Card, and lives in a secluded compound in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The core of the Fethullah Gulen Movement is his network of schools, which extend from South Africa to the United States. The schools emphasize high academic achievement, and they openly recruit and provide scholarships to the brightest students from poor and working class families. Gulenist schools in Turkey routinely produce graduates who score in the upper one percent of the annual university entrance exam. These top graduates often become teachers themselves. The Gulenist doctrine, with its conservative and religiously observant undercurrent, has met fierce hostility in regimes such as Russia, which expelled the Gulenists en masse in the 1990s.

[1](#)6. (C) But it is within Turkey that the movement has its

roots, its largest following, and its greatest controversies.

The Gulen Movement includes not only educational institutions, including the famous Samanyolu ("Milky Way") school in Ankara and Fatih University, but also the

ANKARA 00001722 002 OF 003

Journalists and Writers Foundation, various businesses, and media outlets such as "Zaman," "Today's Zaman" (English language), "Samanyolu TV," and "Aksiyon Weekly." Gulenists also reportedly dominate the Turkish National Police, where they serve as the vanguard for the Ergenekon investigation -- an extensive probe into an alleged vast underground network that is accused of attempting to encourage a military coup in 2004. The investigation has swept up many secular opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), including Turkish military figures, which has prompted accusations that the Gulenists have as their ultimate goal the undermining of all institutions which disapprove of Turkey becoming more visibly Islamist. (COMMENT: The assertion that the TNP is controlled by Gulenists is impossible to confirm but we have found no one who disputes it, and we have heard accounts that TNP applicants who stay at Gulenist pensions are provided the answers in advance to the TNP entrance exam. END COMMENT)

Championing the Ergenekon Probe

17. (C) Gulenist newspapers such as "Zaman" relentlessly question the validity of the Ataturk legacy and argue that as an EU aspirant country, Turkey must ensure the diminished voice of the Turkish military in political issues. These papers champion the Ergenekon investigation and continually stress that the traditional dominance of the Turkish military has been a negative factor in Turkey's history. Not surprisingly, contacts close to the the Turkish General Staff openly loathe Gulen, and contend that he and his legions of supporters are embarked on a ruthless quest not only to undermine the Turkish military but to transform Turkey into an Islamic republic similar to Iran.

18. (C) Even among some Islamist organizations, the Fethullah Gulen Movement seems to have a murky reputation. The former head of the City Women's Platform, Hidayet Tuksal, told us that her group regards Gulen positively, because he disapproves of the use of violence, but that Gulen's lack of transparency creates doubt about his motives and leads to suspicions about what lies ahead -- even within the communities where Gulen is most active. Gulen's purported main goal is to bolster interfaith dialogue and tolerance, but the notion is widespread among many circles in Turkey that his agenda is deeper and more insidious.

19. (C) The Gulen movement has been described as a modernized version of Sunni Hanafi Islam. It shares this orientation with "Milli Gorus," the grouping associated with former PM Necmettin Erbakan, but the two movements are otherwise distinct: "Milli Gorus" is Turkey-centric; the Gulen Movement has a broader scope and is more comfortable with the concept of justifying the means for the end, such as discarding the headscarf when necessary. Still, there is some convergence: many of the founders of AKP came from "Milli Gorus," but many officials within AKP are known to be close to the Gulen movement.

110. (C) Most discussions in Turkey which touch on Gulen tend to be somewhat delicate and deliberately artful. Our interlocutors often seem reluctant to express their views, seemingly uncertain if it will rebound on them to their detriment. In addition, the political context for conversations about Gulen is complicated because President Gul is himself seen by almost all of our contacts as a Gulenist, while Prime Minister Erdogan is not. Indeed, some of our contacts have argued that Erdogan is so firmly outside the Gulen camp that Gulen loyalists view him as a liability. At the same time, the Republican People's Party and other AKP opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party are

quick to accuse the U.S. of working covertly to prop up Gulen, allegedly to weaken Turkey's secular foundation to produce a "model" moderate Islamic nation. This accusation relies on the premise that Gulen was given refuge in the U.S., and ultimately permanent resident status, despite

ANKARA 00001722 003 OF 003

facing indictment in Turkey for illegal anti-secularist activities.

¶11. (C) Gulen has his share of non-Islamic supporters, which includes the Eucumenical Patriarch in Istanbul. In a recent conversation with the Ambassador, the Patriarch reported that he had visited Gulen during his last trip to the United States and had spent more than an hour together in a one-on-one discussion. He planned to see Gulen again on his recent visit to New York. The Patriarch told the Ambassador he had been "very impressed" with Gulen and commented on the quality of Gulen schools, including a Gulenist University in Kazakhstan named for Suleyman Demirel.

Comment

¶12. (C) Given the current AKP-secularist schism in Turkey today, it should not be surprising that any Islamist movement in Turkey would choose to be circumspect about its intentions. Unfortunately, this simply feeds the reflexive tendency in Turkish society for conspiracy theories, and magnifies suspicions about the Gulen movement itself. While the purported Gulen goals of interfaith dialogue and tolerance are beyond reproach, we see aspects of concern in the allegations that the USG is somehow behind the Gulen movement. Accordingly, we would recommend the following standard press guidance:

Q:

Why is the U.S. sheltering Fethullah Gulen and doesn't this mean that the US is promoting a non-secular Turkey?

A:

-- The U.S. is not "sheltering" Mr. Gulen and his presence in the U.S. is not based on any political decision.

-- Mr. Gulen applied for, and received, permanent residence in the U.S. after a lengthy process which ended in 2008 when a Federal Court ruled that he deserved to be viewed as an "alien of extraordinary ability" based on his extensive writings and his leadership of a worldwide religious organization.

-- As a Green Card holder, Mr. Gulen is entitled to all the privileges which that status entails. His presence in the U.S. should not be viewed as a reflection of US policy toward Turkey.

JEFFREY